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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the ways in which philosophy, as a discipline, has been influenced by feminist scholarship in the field. It explains that in the 1970s feminist philosophers introduced questions regarding personal life and sexuality as matters for philosophical analysis, and that scholars began to challenge the notions of the Western canon. Feminists argued that understanding philosophical texts required reading symbolic and metaphorical language to discover subtexts that held philosophical reasoning in place. The essay goes on to discuss the radical interpretive techniques, such as deconstruction, used by feminist philosophers, and explains that scholars have begun to question the very identity and root impulse of the discipline of philosophy. The essay concludes that the use of feminist materials in philosophy courses can lead to deep change in the way that philosophy is conceived of and taught, because women's work in philosophy has tended to be grounded in existential issues, critically self-reflective of its methodology, and open to interdisciplinary enrichment. The document includes a list of related electronic resources. (Contains 48 references.) (MDM)



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ED 432 977

# PHILOSOPHY

*Discipline Analysis*

*Andrea Nye*
*University of Wisconsin, Whitewater*

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WOMEN in the CURRICULUM

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# Women in the Curriculum

# PHILOSOPHY

*Discipline Anal sis*

**Andrea Nye**

**University of Wisconsin**
**Whitewater**

**National Center for**
**Curriculum Transformation**
**Resources on Women**
**1997**

National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women
Institute for Teaching and Research on Women
Towson University
8000 York Road
Baltimore, MD 21252
Phone: (410) 830-3944
Fax: (410) 830-3469
E-mail: ncctrw@towson.edu
http://www.towson.edu/ncctrw

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# PREFACE

Since the 1970s feminist and multicultural scholarship has been challenging the traditional content, organization, methodologies, and epistemologies of the academic disciplines. By now this scholarship is formidable in both quantity and quality and in its engagement of complex issues. The National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women is therefore publishing a series of essays that provide brief, succinct overviews of the new scholarship. Outstanding scholars in the disciplines generously agreed to write the essays, which are intended to help faculty who want to revise courses in light of the new information and perspectives. Each essay is accompanied by a bibliography that includes references for further reading, resources for the classroom, and electronic resources.

Elaine Hedges

Series Editor

# PHILOSOPHY

Feminist perspectives have been particularly challenging in philosophy, a field historically dominated by male thinkers. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, women philosophers began to initiate innovation in almost all aspects of the discipline in North America. Feminist philosophers promoted change in the subjects that philosophers address, the way the philosophical canon is interpreted, the characteristic methodologies of philosophy, and the styles of writing and discussion considered appropriate in philosophy. In addition to introducing specific feminist theories in subdisciplines of philosophy such as epistemology, ethics, philosophy of religion, and metaphysics, they re-identified the nature and sources of philosophical concern.

In the 1970s one of the first innovations, now incorporated into many standard philosophy textbooks, was the introduction as subject matter for philosophical analysis of questions that have to do with personal and sexual life. Sexual morality, sexual equality, monogamy, homosexuality, and abortion rarely had been discussed in philosophy. Instead, philosophers occupied themselves with supposedly more important issues, such as the logic of scientific inquiry or the reality of the external world. Women, however, whose lives were often damaged by sexual abuse or sexual prejudice, saw a vital need for clarification and elucidation in these areas. Several collections of early feminist articles on these subjects remain topical and of continuing value in teaching at the college level. (See, for example, Vetterling-

Braggin et al., 1977; Gould 1976; English 1977). In an age when students demanded input into their education and proven connection to professional or personal interests, feminists introduced and popularized subject matters that made philosophy a viable course offering in integrated and relevant university curricula.

A more controversial area of innovation was in history of philosophy. Philosophy is, to a large extent, the study of a tradition. A large part of its subject matter is interpretation of past great thinkers from Plato to Wittgenstein. The standard assumption in many quarters was that historical figures could be studied apart from their historical situation, their social status, and certainly from their masculinity. Feminists, however, reading the history of philosophy, saw important connections between the class, race, and sex of philosophers and their ideas, opening up fertile new areas of philosophical commentary. No longer would arguments be evaluated for surface logic only. Feminists argued that for the full meaning of theories and inferences to be understood, writers' interests and identities have to be taken into consideration. Groundbreaking works in feminist historical analysis came from Susan Bordo (1987), Genevieve Lloyd (1984), and Jean Elshtain (1981). Collections of feminist critiques of individual figures such as Plato, DeBeauvoir, Arendt, John Stuart Mill, are collected in a series of volumes, *Re-reading the Canon*, edited by Nancy Tuana (Tuana 1994, 1995, and forthcoming). This historical work, pointing out the relevance of sexual politics to the meaning of theories and concepts in philosophy, was responsible for dramatic new insights, insights that have been utilized in some of the newer collections of readings for use in philosophy classes. A reader for ethics, for example, edited by James Sterba, pairs traditional readings with critical interpretations from both feminists and non-Western theorists (Sterba 1995). As a necessarily diverse move-

ment of women, feminism was in the vanguard of fostering not only a broadening of philosophy to include the perspectives of women but also inclusion of non-Western and multi-cultural perspectives.

Historical studies which relativized and humanized philosophical theory raised profound questions about the status of philosophical knowledge. Philosophers throughout the history of the subject have claimed insight into a deeper, higher, or more elemental reality hidden from ordinary men and women. Established philosophical methods were available for understanding and evaluating theories about this deeper reality: a philosopher should give clear definitions of his concepts, he should be consistent, his conclusions should follow from certain or necessary premises. Feminist historical studies suggested that for philosophical knowledge more is needed than logical consistency. In addition to the need, already discussed, to be aware of the identity of the writer or speaker—his or her class, race, sex, social status—one needs to be aware of the intentional source of ideas, why and for what purposes they were developed, purposes that might not be avowed or even consciously known by their authors. The feminist epistemologist, Sandra Harding, argued that truth in science and elsewhere requires not only logical correctness but a "strong objectivity," which critically examines given results and also the presuppositions, values, and methods used in obtaining results (Harding 1986).

Feminists argued further that understanding philosophical texts requires reading symbolic and metaphorical language to discover subtexts that hold philosophical reasoning in place. Michelle LeDoeuff, a French feminist philosopher, pointed to recurring images in the philosophical writing of figures like Sartre and Kant, images that are written off in most philosophical commentary as irrelevant or popularizing. Sartre, for example, explaining his central

concept of "bad faith," used vignettes of a superior man correcting a "frigid" woman, an awkward waiter, a confused student. Such images, she showed, are a key to grasping the social content of theorizing (LeDoeuff 1989). Eva Kittay argued that the very identity of philosophy can be traced back to a Platonic metaphor of spiritual midwifery, which excluded women, who are involved in actual physical birth (Kittay 1988).

Feminists found radical interpretive techniques in various postmodern and poststructuralist philosophies. Deconstruction, for example, offered tools by which sexist, racist, or classist motifs could be identified and undermined. The supposed revelatory logic of philosophy could be shown to be a text, with all pretense to consistency and closure as well as any claim to reveal the presence of reality compromised (Irigaray 1985). Jacques Lacan, the notorious French Freud, offered a fresh version of psychoanalysis that took account of hierarchical oppositions built into the structure of thought and language. Studies followed that psychoanalyzed philosophical autonomy and distance (Gallop 1982; Flax 1993). Feminists were also inspired by Michel Foucault, whose theories of discourse related discursive structures to material forms of coercion and control (Bartky 1990; Butler 1990). The relevance to philosophy of postmodern perspectives, and attendant cross-disciplinary interactions with fields like psychoanalysis, linguistics, and social theory, has been the subject of lively discussion in flourishing feminist journals such as *Hypatia* and *Signs*. The former, with roots in the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP), a group under the umbrella of the American Philosophical Society (APA), is particularly rich as a source of materials in all aspects of feminist philosophy. Collections of papers appeared debating at length the usefulness of postmodern and deconstructionist techniques in philosophy in general, and to feminists in particular. (For example, see Nicholson 1989.)

American and British philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s prided itself on its professionalism. Leaders in the field, like W.V.O. Quine, Saul Kripke, and Donald Davidson carved out a protected bastion of philosophical truth occupied with logical semantics and analysis. Feminist historical studies and the new postmodern techniques raised substantial questions about such a program. Perhaps most inflammatory were feminist critiques of logic. Modern mathematical logic throughout the twentieth century has been a nerve center of philosophy. Science might be the authority on specific theories, but many philosophers see their distinctive role in analyzing and criticizing the logical form of any theory.

The first feminist questions about logic addressed the adversarial form of philosophical debate (Moulton 1983). Although this initial attack on "rationality" as traditionally defined was resisted by some feminists (Grimshaw 1986; Anthony and Witt 1993), more radical attempts to get at the social content of logic soon followed. Logical systems are traditionally understood by philosophers as versions of a universal inferential structure inherent in any intelligible language and constant over cultures and throughout time. Disputing this view, I argued, for example, that different logics could be understood as forms of particular speech styles linked to authoritarian institutions such as the church or university (Nye 1990).

Even though much of the profession would continue to resist and even ridicule many of these innovations, feminists were having an effect not only on the content of philosophical theory but on the way the discipline is organized and practiced. As a result of protest against a narrowly professional philosophy focused on logical analysis, beginning in the 1970s there was a successful movement for diversity in the American Philosopical Association in which feminists played a major role. Groups like the Soci-

ety for Women in Philosophy, and the Society for the Study of Women Philosophers, as well as other groups with feminist connections—for the study of radical philosophy, continental philosophy, African philosophy—prospered as "Special Fields" with regular meetings in conjunction with the APA, adding a new pluralism to the profession. Also in the seventies, the APA began a series of newsletters on Teaching Philosophy, which included syllabi, bibliography, course descriptions in feminist philosophy and other areas of interest to feminists, such as medical ethics. A standing Committee on the Status of Women was established.

Within the groups that began to meet inside the APA, new methods of discussing and implementing philosophy were pioneered, many mirroring developments in feminist pedagogy. Instead of the hostile "Author Meets Critics" format, sessions were organized as "dialogues" between writers of recent and related books. Audience participation was fostered in the form of workshops. Speakers combined accounts of personal experience with abstract theory and pragmatic implications with conceptual analysis. Although some in philosophy deplored what they saw as a confessional and political tainting of philosophy, these exchanges went some way to making philosophy less abstract debate and more shared work of making sense of a diversity of human experience.

In philosophy departments, new course offerings appeared—in Feminist Philosophy, Feminist Theory, Gender Politics, Lesbian Culture. In mainstream courses like Introduction to Philosophy instructors made attempts to incorporate work by women into their reading lists. The demand for women philosophers led to important and ongoing groundwork recovering neglected or marginalized women philosophers (Waithe 1987-1995; Atherton 1994; Nye 1993). Although standard texts and readers were slow to

include the work of women, supplementary materials were often used in xerox or as second texts. I, for example, have used Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking*, Hannah Arendt's *On Violence*, and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in Introduction to Philosophy classes along with more traditional readings.

But the feminist influence in philosophy goes further than adding women to a list of great philosophers, or even including feminist critiques of hidden bias or sexist agenda in philosophical theory. In question is the very identity and root impulse of the discipline of philosophy. Although there are as many opinions on this subject as there are philosophers, there have been broad areas of agreement. Philosophers are not politicians involved in human affairs. Philosophers are not scientists doing empirical research in laboratories. Philosophers are involved with conceptual studies and logical issues. Often a narrow range of philosophical questions—do other minds exist? are there only material substances? is goodness a natural quality?—has defined the field. Feminist philosophy, linked to feminist liberation movements, broadened the scope of philosophical concern. The problems of philosophy, as feminists see them, are not only the problems of a certain written tradition dominated by men, but are generated in human experience, experience not always or even often congruent with the experience of men or men of privileged classes. Feminists did not see philosophy as the solving of conceptual puzzles which have no bearing on practical life. They did not see philosophy as the analysis of the grammar of "we" educated academics, not when that "we" is increasingly problematized as a voice of racism and classism.

For feminist philosophers, traditional issues like the nature of personal identity take on new dimensions. How independent is one's sense of self from the object one is for others? Is it possible to escape from the social determi-

nants that make one feminine? In ground-breaking works, feminists explored the self from new angles. (See Gloria Anzaldua (1990) and Maria Lugones (1987) on ethnic identity, Sarah Hoagland on lesbian values (1988), Judith Butler (1990) on gender identity, bell hooks on race (1984), to name just a few.)

Feminists took new approaches in all areas of philosophy. In political philosophy dominant social contract and utilitarian models were undermined and supplemented (Pateman 1988). Mainstream theories of justice were critiqued (Okin 1989; Young 1990). In philosophy of religion, the theology of Christian patriarchy was examined, sparking a movement of feminist spirituality (Daly 1973). Work in philosophy of law initiated changes in rape laws, the creation of the legal category of sexual harassment, and a new approach to pornography (MacKinnon 1987). In ethics, the research of social psychologist Carol Gilligan on the different moral voices of men and women led to new lines of ethical thought and heated discussion of the place of care and emotion in moral judgement. (See Card (1991) for a collection of recent articles in feminist ethics.) In theory of knowledge, feminists theorized a science reflectively critical of its institutional environment, the social sources of its concepts, the pragmatic significance of its theories, and possible ethnocentric prejudice (Keller 1985; Longino 1990).

Currently, the inclusion of feminist insights and controversies in philosophy courses takes a number of forms. Simple efforts to include women philosophers can lead to a startling and disconcerting reorientation of materials. For example one might read, along with Descartes, his contemporary Elisabeth Palatine (Nye forthcoming) or, along with Liebniz, his contemporary Anne Conway. Hannah Arendt, Edith Stein, Simone DeBeauvoir, Simone Weil, and other neglected thinkers are also increasingly available for study

in new editions. Although in the past the conceptual readjustments necessary when women's work is included have been a pretext for saying that women are not philosophers, or not important philosophers, the effect of these new materials is enlivening in a field increasingly marginalized as universities focus on professional training and general studies. In addition, feminists have been in the forefront in promoting stimulating expansion of the canon of philosophy to include African philosophy, Hispanic philosophy, and African-American philosophy.

Instructors also can include in philosophy courses some of the increasing number of critical feminist readings of historical figures. One might try Carol Pateman on Locke, Luce Irigaray on Plato, Susan Bordo on Descartes. These readings are extremely useful in generating student discussion and bringing to life relevant issues. Instructors, once they are familiar with feminist critiques, can themselves raise feminist issues. For example, I often mimic Locke's constant use of the word "man" in his treatises on government, provoking student comment which usually results in heated discussion of whether Locke's natural right can be extended to women as well as men.

In addition to adding women philosophers, including feminist commentary, raising feminist issues, and using nonadversarial experiential pedagogy, there is also available a considerable body of original and innovative feminist philosophy in all of the traditional areas of philosophy—epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, etc.—which can be included as a permanent part of philosophical tradition. (See Nye (1995) for a review of the main figures and themes.)

Use of feminist materials can lead to deep change in the way philosophy is conceived and taught. Women's work in philosophy has tended to be grounded in existential issues, critically self-reflective of its methodology, and

open to interdisciplinary enrichment. These qualities lead to the presentation of philosophy not as abstract theories or oppositional debate but as mutual exploration and discussion of conflicts in human life, not the least important of which are conflicts in personal and family relationships.

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# Electronic Resources

Compiled by Phyllis Holman Weisbard, University of Wisconsin System Women Studies Librarian.

## Discussion Lists

SWIP-L is an information and discussion list for members of the Society for Women in Philosophy and others interested in feminist philosophy. To subscribe, send the message:

**SUBSCRIBE SWIP-L** [*yourfirstname yourlastname*] to LISTSERV@CFRVM.CFR.USF.EDU

FRENCH-FEMINISM is a list for dicussion of the work of contemporary French feminists such as Luce Irigaray. To subscribe, send the message:

**SUBSCRIBE FRENCH-FEMINISM** to MAJORDOMO@LISTS.VILLAGE.VIRGINIA.EDU

There are scores of other academic lists of potential interest. The most complete and up-to-date list of lists is maintained by Joan Korenman on the World Wide Web at the following address.
http://www.umbc.edu/wmst/links.html

(Note: WWW addresses are case-sensitive; be sure to type addresses exactly as they appear.)

## Syllabi

University of Maryland Women's Studies Resources syllabi collection has over fifteen syllabi on philosophy, feminist theory, or feminist methodology. Use the World Wide Web location given below.
http://www.inform.umd.edu:8080/EdRes/Topic/WomensStudies/Syllabi

### *Bibliographies*

"Noema: The Collaborative Bibliography of Women in Philosophy" is a project in collaborative scholarship with a database containing over 4,100 records representing the work of over 1,600 women (as of 12/8/95), maintained by Noel Parish Hutchings. Address: http//billyboy.ius.indiana.edu/WomeninPhilosophy/WomeninPhilo.html

Bibliographies from the University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Librarian's Office:

"Annotated Bibliography of Feminist Aesthetics in the Literary, Performing, and Visual Arts," by Estella Lauter and Linda Krumholz (1992).
gopher://silo.adp.wisc.edu:70/11/.uwlibs/.womenstudies/.fem_aesthetics

"Ecofeminism: An Introductory Bibliography," by Julie Knutson (1995).
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"Feminist Perspectives on the Ethic of Care: A Selected Bibliography," by Virginia Dudley (1994).
gopher://silo.adp.wisc.edu:70/00/.uwlibs/.womenstudies/.ethicbib

## *Useful Sources for Materials*

*American Philosophical Association Newsletters*. These are published biannually. Although they now include materials for teaching other topics, such as philosophy and medicine, and philosophy and the black experience, they always include a substantial section on feminism and philosophy, with syllabi, ideas for texts, feminist perspectives of use in various philosophy offerings, and

feminist pedagogical techniques. Some back issues can be purchased from the American Philosophical Association. The current issue is always available at the Association's web site: www.OXY.edu/APA/APA.html

*Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. *Hypatia* is a valuable resource for materials on all aspects of philosophy and feminism. Special issues are often published, on topics such as environmental studies or feminist aesthetics. *Hypatia* is available in university libraries and indexed in academic indexes and in file 57 of DIALOG.

*Society for Women in Philosophy* (SWIP). All regional sections of the Society have regular meetings and publish a newsletter free to members which includes, along with notice of meetings, news of other conferences, publications, and academic initiatives.

## About the Author

Andrea Nye teaches philosophy and feminist theory at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She is the author of a number of books in feminist philosophy, including *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man*, *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*, *Philosophia*, and most recently, *Philosophy and Feminism: At the Border*, a review of the current status of feminist work in the discipline of philosophy.

# Reader Comment

## Discipline Analysis Essay: Philosophy

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## Publications of the National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women

### WOMEN IN THE CURRICULUM

**The following publications consist of directories, manuals, and essays covering the primary information needed by educators to transform the curriculum to incorporate the scholarship on women. The publications have been designed to be brief, user friendly, and cross referenced to each other. They can be purchased as a set or as individual titles. Tables of contents and sample passages are available on the National Center Web page: http://www.towson.edu/ncctrw/.**

➢ ***Directory of Curriculum Transformation Projects and Activities in the U.S.***

The *Directory* provides brief descriptions of 237 curriculum transformation projects or activities from 1973 to the present. It is intended to help educators review the amount and kinds of work that have been occurring in curriculum transformation on women and encourage them to consult project publications (see also *Catalog of Resources*) and to contact project directors for more information about projects of particular interest and relevance to their needs.

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*(Available fall 1997)*

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*(Available fall 1997)*

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